Change to Conservation Measure for the Yuma Clapper Rail
Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program
Draft Program Decision Document 20-002

Steering Committee Motion

The Steering Committee approves Reclamation's recommended changes to conservation measure CLRA1 to revise Yuma Clapper rail water depths, specifically:

CLRA1: Create and manage 512 acres of marsh to provide Yuma clapper rail habitat ~~(Figure 5-2)~~. This created habitat will also provide habitat for the western least bittern and the California black rail (see conservation measures LEBI1 and BLRA1). Habitat will be created in patches as large as possible but will not be created in patches smaller than 5 acres. Smaller patches are likely to support isolated nesting pairs and be within the range of habitat patch sizes used by the species for foraging and dispersal. Larger patches would be expected to support multiple nesting pairs. Additional Yuma clapper rail habitat may be provided by marsh vegetation that becomes established along margins of the 360 acres of backwaters that will be created in Reaches 3–6. These small patches of habitat would provide cover for dispersing rails, thereby facilitating linkages between existing breeding populations and the colonization of created habitats.

Yuma clapper rail habitat will be created and maintained as described in Section 5.4.3.3. Marshes created to provide Yuma clapper rail habitat will be designed and managed to provide an integrated mosaic of wetland vegetation types, water depths, and open water areas. Within this mosaic of marsh conditions, Yuma clapper rail habitat will generally be provided by patches of bulrush and cattails interspersed with small patches of open water with water levels maintained at depths appropriate for this species. ~~(no more than 12 inches~~. Created marsh habitat will generally be managed to provide for gradual fluctuations in water level during Yuma clapper rail breeding season (March – June).

Current Conservation Measure

5.7.1.2 Conservation Measures (LCR MSCP 2004)

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Justification

According to the Habitat Conservation Plan, the marsh habitat created by the LCR MSCP must maintain water levels at appropriate depths for this species, which is defined as no more than 12 inches. The LCR MSCP has interpreted this as water levels at created marsh habitat will be maintained between 0 and 12 inches at all times.

There is strong evidence from the LCR and the scientific literature that Yuma clapper rails can tolerate fluctuating water levels with water depths greater than 12 inches (Dodge and Rudd 2017, Edelman 1989, Nadeau et al 2011). The 12-inch limit reduces the LCR MSCP's ability to fluctuate marsh levels to encourage a mixture of cattail and rush species and manage salt levels. Removal of the specific water depth will not change the intent of the conservation measure, to create and manage appropriate habitat for the species, using the best available information. It should increase management flexibility and habitat quality.

Literature Cited

Dodge, C. and N. Rudd. 2017. Marsh Bird Water Depth Analysis, 2016 Progress Report. Annual report prepared by the Lower Colorado Multi-Species Conservation Program, Bureau of Reclamation, Boulder City, Nevada.

Edleman, W.R. 1989. Biology of the Yuma Clapper Rail in the Southwestern U.S. and Northwestern Mexico, Final Report, July 1989. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Contract 4-AA-30-02060.

Nadeau, C.P., C.J. Conway, M.A. Conway, and M. Ogonowski. 2011. Restoration of Managed Marsh Units to Benefit California Black Rails and Other Marsh Birds: An Adaptive Management Approach, Final Report. Wildlife Research Report #2011-01, U.S. Geological Survey Arizona Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, Tucson, Arizona, USA.